

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8998

INFO AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

C O N F I D E N T I A L KINSHASA 6479

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PGOV, CG, ELAB, PINS

SUBJECT: MOBUTU FOCUSES ON DOMESTIC PROBLEMS

1. DURING THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS PRESIDENT MOBUTU HAS PAID INCREASING ATTENTION TO HIS DOMESTIC ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL PROBLEMS. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF A BRIEF TRIP TO ZAMBIA FOR THE OPENING OF THE TAZARA RAILROAD, HE HAS SHELVED PLANS FOR SEVERAL FOREIGN VISITS APPARENTLY IN ORDER TO LOOK AFTER MORE PRESSING MATTERS AT HOME. HENCE, DESPITE PREVIOUS INDICATIONS HE WOULD ATTEND OAU SUMMIT, HE SENT FOREIGN MINISTER NGUSA INSTEAD. SIMILARLY, ALTHOUGH MOBUTU HIMSELF TOLD PRESS SEVERAL WEEKS AGO HE WOULD GO TO COLOMBO NAC SUMMIT THIS MONTH, HE HAS AGAIN DECIDED TO LET NGUZA CARRY THE BALL. MOBUTU HAD ALSO PLANNED VISIT TO SENEGAL (WHICH ANNOUNCED IN DAKAR), IVORY COAST, TOGO AND GABON LATE JULY; APPARENTLY ALL OF THESE VISITS HAVE NOW BEEN CANCELLED OR AT LEAST POSTPONED.

2. MOBUTU INSTEAD SPENT ALMOST TEN DAYS BETWEEN JULY 10-21 TOURING SHABA AND EASTERN KASAI REGIONS, SCENES OF
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RECENT LABOR DISTURBANCES WHICH HAVE HAD INCREASING POLITICAL

OVERTONES. IT IS STILL UNCLEAR HOW MUCH HE ACCOMPLISHED DURING THIS SWING INTO ZAIRE'S SOUTHEAST--THE FIRST IN MORE THAN A YEAR--WITH RESPECT TO BOTH REASSERTING HIS AUTHORITY AND PLACATING A POPULACE WHICH HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY RESTIVE UNDER THE PRESSURE OF DETERIORATING ECONOMIC CONDITIONS. THE GENERAL CONSENSUS OF OBSERVERS HERE SEEMS TO BE THAT, WHEREAS MOBUTU MAY HAVE MADE SOME PROGRESS, ALL DID NOT GO WELL AND THE CHANCES FOR MORE STRIKES AND PERHAPS ALSO SOME POLITICAL DISTURBANCES IN THAT AREA REMAIN QUITE HIGH. FEEDING THIS IMPRESSION ARE RUMORS CURRENTLY CIRCULATING IN KINSHASA THAT DURING THE TRIP THERE WAS A THREAT ON MOBUTU'S LIFE: SOME SAY A PLOT BY MILITARY OFFICERS IN LUBUMBASHI, OTHERS CLAIM AN ATTEMPTED SHOOTING IN MBUJI MAYI IN EASTERN KASAI. WHATEVER THE PRECISE FACTS--WHICH WE MAY NOT KNOW FOR SOME TIME--IT DOES APPEAR THAT A SECURITY CONCERN AROSE WHICH MAY ACCOUNT FOR SOME OF MOBUTU'S LAST-MINUTE DECISIONS TO STAY IN THE COUNTRY AT THIS PARTICULAR TIME.

3. SINCE HIS RETURN FROM THE SOUTHEAST, MOBUTU HAS CARRIED ON HIS USUALLY HEAVY SCHEDULE OF APPOINTMENTS, CEREMONIES AND MEETINGS OF THE POLITICAL BUREAU AND EXECUTIVE COUNCIL. ALTHOUGH HE FAILED TO SHOW UP AS ANNOUNCED AT THE CLOSING OF THE FIKIN FAIR LAST WEEKEND, HE HOSTED A RECEPTION FOR SOME 2,000 MEMBERS OF THE BELGIAN COMMUNITY JULY 28. ON JULY 31 MOBUTU HEADED BACK INTO THE INERIOR FOR MORE FACE-TO-FACE ENCOUNTERS WITH THE PEOPLE, THIS TIME IN WESTERN KASAI. AN ADDITIONAL INDICATION OF HIS CONCERN WITH THE DETERIORATING POLITICAL SITUATION WAS THE INCLUSION IN HIS ENTOURAGE OF GENERAL MULAMBA, A KANANGA FAVORITE SON WHOSE THREAT TO OUTSHINE MOBUTU LED TO DIPLOMATIC EXILE IN 1967.

4. WE WILL HAVE TO WAIT AWHILE BEFORE WE CAN DETERMINE THE NET IMPACT OF MOBUTU'S EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN HIS LEADERSHIP IMAGE, WHICH FOR SOME TIME HAS BEEN SAGGING UNDER THE WEIGHT OF THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL DISTRESS. BUT HIS CURRENT ACTIVITIES DO REFLECT A REALIZATION THAT HIS MOST SERIOUS PROBLEMS ARE HERE AT HOME AND THAT THE PEOPLE'S CONCERNS ARE DEEP ENOUGH NOT TO BE DEFLECTED BY THE PRESIDENT'S EXPLOITS ABROAD.

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